

Prayer

Lord Jesus, we can barely understand what it must have been like to minister to Your people, knowing that You would have to go to Jerusalem to die. Nevertheless, we know from Your Word that You faced the future with great courage, faith, determination and love. We ask You therefore to help us do the same, so that we might be victorious over the enemy, just as You were. Thank You Lord Jesus: AMEN

Prayer Suggestions

Prayer ideas (offered to help you consider more than your regular routine of prayers)

If there is something on your heart, submit this to the Lord in prayer and in your own heart, hand the future of this issue over to the Lord. Then, and only then, ask the Lord what you should do about it; exercise practical faith.

On-going prayers (to supplement your own prayers about personal concerns and items of news)

- **Pray blessings on your neighbours** *Pray for the homes of your neighbours, and pray for the safety of the neighbourhood. Pray about any problems of burglary and theft, and against an evil that you believe afflicts the neighbourhood.*
- *Pray for the news media, and pray that they will report the news faithfully and for the benefit of all*
- *Give thanks to God for the people you have met today, and pray for them and their needs*

Meditation

I need a place of safety where I may rest, O Lord
So forgive my wayward spirit and lead me back to You

I do not know where to go and need to ask the way
So turn me back to receive the gracious help You offer

I keep on going when I am too tired and need to stop
So save me from exhaustion, and fill me with Your Spirit

I take advice from others yet ignore Your guidance
So draw my eyes away from self and set them on Your Word

I tire of the burdens I carry, and all that slows me down;
So give me courage to release myself to You and be free.

I seek to be obedient to You, my Lord and God;
So that I may cease to be a slave and be Your child.

Bible passage - Hebrews 1:5-7

⁵ To which of the angels did God ever say,

‘You are my Son; I have become Your Father today’?

Or again,

‘I will be a Father to Him, and He will be my Son’?

⁶ And again, when He leads the firstborn into the world, He says,

‘Let all the angels of God worship Him.’

⁷ And He says of the angels,

‘He makes His angels spirits, His servants of flames and of fire.’

Bible Study

Review

The letter to the Hebrews begins with a wonderful and powerful introduction affirming the nature and glory of the Son of God, who is Jesus Christ (1:2). In order to prove this, the letter goes on to use a series of seven texts from the Old Testament. The seven quotes take up the rest of Hebrews chapter 1, and each one is introduced by the briefest of comments. In this way, the writer seeks to convince us that the Son of God has indeed come. He is not an angel, but the divine Son of God who has come into the world for a purpose designed specifically by God.

Today's reading contains the first four quotes of these seven quotes, and tomorrow, we will look at the following three quotes. The total number of quotes is interesting, because the number 'seven' indicates completeness. We can therefore reckon that they are a 'complete' set of 'proof texts' used by early Christians to defend the faith. It is likely that such groups of 'proof texts' were used to help the early Christians remember what they believed and help them discuss their faith, but we cannot know whether this set of texts was borrowed from elsewhere or written for this letter. Now if this list is the first of its kind that was written down, then it proved to be a valuable resource for the early church as it sought to 'defend the faith'!

Before we look at them in more detail, we should be aware that when we compare the quotes here with the text of the Old Testament we use today, the two appear different. This is because the writer of Hebrews quotes a version of the Old Testament known in Jesus' day as the 'Septuagint'. This was a Greek translation of the ancient Hebrew text, made in the centuries before the life of Christ. Quite understandably, scholars of the first century used the version of the Old Testament with which they were most familiar, and it is not the version we use today (which is derived from the original Hebrew). In fact, the quotes from the Septuagint are quoted quite accurately.

The first quote is, '*You are my Son; I have become Your Father today*' (1:5), and it comes from Psalm 2:7. This verse has been used in many different ways over the centuries, but it is clear that the early church used it to refer to Jesus' resurrection, the day when the Father gave 'new birth' to the Son! So the writer of Hebrews wants us to know that no angels have ever been raised to life, only Jesus has been raised from the dead, and this is proof that He is God's Son.

The second quote follows on quickly; '*I will be a Father to Him, and He will be my Son*' (1:5). This comes from 2 Samuel 7:14, and also 1 Chron. 17:13. The important feature of this quote is that it is the only place in Hebrews that emphasises the close relationship of 'Father' and 'Son'; however, the point made here is this. The Saviour is no angel or created being, He is divine, and directly related to God the Father.

The third quote is from Deuteronomy 32:43; '*Let all the angels of God worship Him*' (1:6), where Moses describes God's command to the angels to worship Him. Now in our passage (1:6), the writer of Hebrews tells us that the angels will worship when God brings His 'firstborn' into the world, meaning Jesus Christ. This is reflected in Luke's report of the birth of Jesus, in which we are told that there was a host of angels 'praising God' at Jesus' birth (Luke 2:14). Clearly, the Saviour is no angel, but one whom angels worship!

Lastly, the quote '*He makes His angels spirits, His servants of flames and of fire*' (1:7) comes from Psalm 104:4. As verse 7 clearly says, this quote tells us about the work of angels, who ministered in spiritual realms, as represented by the classic symbols of wind and fire (1:7). In this way, Hebrews maintains the same point that the work of Jesus is quite different from that of angels.

Most of these quotes tell us about the nature of angels, and tomorrow we will see what the writer has to say about the Son, by way of comparison, and this is his point. Jesus is the greatest representation of God anyone can imagine, moreover the writer's point is not mere symbolism. The rest of his letter develops the theme of the work done by Jesus to fulfil God's eternal promises of salvation, given first to the Jewish people.

Discipleship

Questions (for use in groups)

1. What would be the value, and the dangers, of keeping a set of 'proof texts' which you believed encapsulated key elements of your faith

2. In your group, list what this passage tells us about angels, and what it tells us about the Son.
3. Check up some of the passages against what it says in your own version of the Old Testament. Are there any substantial differences?

Personal comments by author

It is always a challenge to consider how we use the Scriptures. I find it astonishing to attend church services and observe that the Scriptures are only used in the context of preaching the Word. It shows that some think of the Bible as being the 'text book' of Christian faith rather than the love letter of God, for example, and this is tragic. We use God's Word in worship and devotion because it is God's Word; His communication with us in a wide variety of ways. It is not just 'sermon material'; it is help, songs, story, history, wise advice, prophecy about the present and the future, and so much more.

Ideas for exploring discipleship

- *I would ask you to think about whether you could identify seven short passages which you feel will say everything which needs to be said about the work of Jesus Christ; his life, death, and resurrection.*
- *Pray against the tendency amongst some Christian to ignore what the bible says about what we believe, leading some to select texts to support what they already believe rather than allow the Scriptures to regulate the truth we proclaim.*

Final Prayer

Almighty Father, give us humility in the face of the great truths of the Gospel. May we handle them with dignity and care, and always remember that we are dependent upon You for everything, including our wisdom and understanding. Guide us in all truth, Almighty Father; AMEN
